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DOES PHILOSOPHY REQUIRE DE-TRANSCENDENTALIZATION? HABERMAS, APEL, AND THE ROLE OF TRANSCENDENTALS IN PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION

Abstract
The heritage of transcendental philosophy, and more specifically its viability when it comes to the problematic of the philosophy of social sciences, has been a key point of dissensus between Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel. Whereas Apel has explicitly aimed at a transcendental-pragmatic transformation of philosophy, Habermas has consequently insisted that his formal pragmatics, and the theory of communicative action which is erected upon it, radically de-transcendentalizes the subject. In a word, the disagreement concerns whether transcendental entities have any substantial role to play in philosophical discourse and social-scientific explanations. My aim is to reconstruct how Apel establishes a connection between transcendentals, qua the ideal communicative community and the possibility of non-objectifying self-reflection. As I shall demonstrate, the principles that transcendental pragmatics sees as underlying social actions are not to be understood in a strictly judicial way, as "supernorms." Rather, they should be conceptualized and used as a means for action regulation and mutual action coordination. Against this backdrop, I show that the concept of the ideal community provides the necessary underpinnings for Habermas' schema of validity claims and the project of reconstructive sciences.

Keywords
citizen participation, urban governance, public space, urban design, public art, urban regeneration, bottom-up processes

1. INTRODUCTION: A FAMILY DISPUTE

The heritage of transcendental philosophy, and more specifically its viability when it comes to the problematic of the philosophy of social sciences, has been one of the major focal points of dissensus between Jürgen Habermas and his fellow traveler, Karl-Otto Apel. Whereas Apel has explicitly sought to establish a transcendental-pragmatic transformation of philosophy, Habermas has insisted that his formal pragmatics, and the theory of communicative action that is erected upon it,[1] radically de-transcendentalizes the subject. In Habermas's view, transcendentalism is inextricably tied to the philosophy of consciousness from which he, ever since the publication of *Erkenntnis und Interesse*,[2] has been trying to break away.[3] Apel, by contrast, has been of the opinion that philosophy can only avoid the pitfalls of monologicality (or methodological solipsism) if transcendentalism is not abandoned and, moreover, is radicalized. In a word, the disagreement concerns whether transcendental entities have any substantial role to play in philosophical discourse and social-scientific explanations.

The divergence between Habermas and Apel can be traced back to the consequences that each of them derives from otherwise shared assumptions. More specifically, both thinkers take it that language (i.e. speech) constitutes a propositional-performative unity, and as such generates its own, intrinsic meta-language, which is related to the first-order language in a self-corrective manner. Apel and Habermas take this two-tier structure of language to be foundational with respect to a special type of "sciences," namely "reconstructive sciences"[4] or "critical social science."[5] What they have not been able to agree on is whether the claims laid out by these sciences are universally valid, and hence infallible (or even falsifiable). In the pertinent discussion, Habermas has been more inclined to emphasize the limitations that his formal-pragmatic approach to language imposes upon philosophy. Simply put, Habermas highlights the fact that a second-order discourse cannot be treated as a final instance of appeal for first-order communicative actions. Apel, for his part, has been convinced that

[1] As he himself emphasized, all too often the theory of communicative action is divorced from its formal-pragmatic underpinnings (Jürgen Habermas, "A Reply," in *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas's "The Theory of Communicative Action,"* ed. Axel Honneth and Hans Joas, trans. D. L. Jones (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991).

[2] Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968); *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

[3] Jürgen Habermas, "What is Universal Pragmatics?," in *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, ed. Maeve Cooke (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 21–104.

[4] Jürgen Habermas, "Actions, Speech Acts, Linguistically Mediated Interactions, and Lifeworld," in *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, ed. Maeve Cooke (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 240.

[5] Karl-Otto Apel, *Understanding and Explanation*, trans. Georgia Warnke (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1984).

a critical potential of self-referentiality could ultimately be made to manifest itself in the form of "institutions of metaethics."[6] Apel reasons that since we can reflect upon the conditions of possibility for speech (communicative action) that are embedded in it, we can also have discourses about these conditions, which means in turn that we can put the principles as uncovered in the course of formal-pragmatic analysis into the service of action regulation and coordination. What this presupposes is that these principles can act as a general frame of reference for communicative actions, and hence must, on pain of the loss of meaning, be considered as binding for all discourses and social practices.

My secondary goal here is to reconstruct the way in which Apel establishes a connection between transcendentals, *qua* the ideal communicative community and the possibility of non-objectifying self-reflection. As I shall demonstrate, the principles that transcendental pragmatics deems as underlying social actions are not to be understood in a strictly judicial way, that is, as "supernorms." Rather, they should be conceptualized and utilized as a means for action regulation and mutual action coordination. Apel's pragmatic version of transcendentalism is predicated on the dialectic between the real and ideal communicative community, and entails that every actor is capable not only of participating in specific, convention-based practices, but also of attending to the way in which different types of engagements (and "interests" associated with them) relate to one another against the background of the general frame of reference (the coordinate system for action), which is what endows social actors with the power to self-regulate in the course of action, thus allowing them to act rationally, ethically, creatively, and responsibly. Against this backdrop, I show that the concept of the ideal community provides the necessary underpinnings for Habermas's schema of validity claims and the project of reconstructive sciences.

2. THE "RADICAL TRANSCENDENTALIZATION" OF THE SUBJECT: APEL'S CRITICAL APPROPRIATION OF LANGUAGE-GAME THEORY

Apel's point of departure is the classical philosophical problem, usually referred to as the controversy over *fact* versus *norms* – or, in his own terminology, *explanation* versus *understanding*.[7] The problem concerns the position of the researcher – or, more generally, of the knower – with respect to the "object" under scrutiny. Critically, according to Apel, there is much more at stake in the controversy than mere methodological questions of the humanities and social sciences: the significance and urgency of the problem stems from the fact that our response to it is decisive when it comes to the shape of the project of modern ethics.

[6] Karl-Otto Apel, *The Response of Discourse Ethics to the Moral Challenge of the Human Situation as Such and Especially Today. Mercier Lectures, March 1999.* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001).
[7] Apel, *Understanding and Explanation*.

Apel has developed his own view on the matter by way of a critical appropriation of Wittgenstein's language-game "theory" (LGT). He has shown that, in some important respects, the theory is a continuation of the project of the "radical transcendentalization of the subject" as initiated in the *Tractatus*.[8] The manner in which Wittgenstein has gone about transcendentalizing the subject is seen by Apel to be a source of both profound insights and pressing difficulties. On the one hand, Apel is in full agreement with the Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations* that a researcher is always-already an agent in the social world. He therefore embraces Wittgenstein's idea that only a firmly transcendentalist position is able to overcome monologicality, and thus to preempt the flooding of philosophical discourse with metaphysical speculation. On the other hand, however, Apel is of the opinion that the postulate of internal (logical) connection between intentions and performances (or means of expression) had led Wittgenstein and his followers to exclude, without proper warrant, the very possibility of an ideal language-game, which in turn had unintentionally given rise to a kind of situationism that entirely rejects the possibility of meta--reference and criticism.

By way of a brief reminder, the idea that came to be known as the Logical Connection Argument (LCA) has it that intentions and reasons cannot be treated as causes in social-scientific explanations because intentions are logically inseparable from actions that they motivate, and hence must be contained in the description of every action to be explained (explanandum).[9] In Apel's somewhat broadened formulation, LCA states that "the meaning of a goal intention, the meaning of the situation assessment, and the meaning of the action to be explained is an internal, conceptual-analytic, even logical relation."[10] The argument does not so much solve the problem of intentionality as it eliminates the problematic altogether by making the subject and the object immanent to a performance and a form of life that circumscribes it. The cost of this move, however, is rather high.

As Apel points out, LCA is essentially a reformulation of the central thesis of the *Tractatus*, according to which the difference between facts (states of affairs) and acts (the means of expression) is of a transcendental, as opposed to

[8] Karl-Otto Apel, "Wittgenstein and the Problem of Hermeneutic Understanding," in *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, ed. Glyn Adey and David Fisby (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998), 1–45.

[9] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd.; New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, Inc., 1922); *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958); Charles Landesman, "The New Dualism in the Philosophy of Mind," *Review of Metaphysics* 19, no. 2 (December 1965): 329–345; Georg H. Von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971); Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[10] Apel, *Understanding and Explanation*, 71.

an ontological, character. As a consequence, Wittgenstein's project as endeavored in the *Tractatus* is afflicted with the problem of belief sentences.[11] Belief sentences entail a relative distancing between the subject and the subject matter, in this case, between the subject and his or her own beliefs. Since, however, the complementarity of facts and acts allegedly bars any form of cognitive distancing, transcendentalism of this sort is left with no means by which to express its own tenets. Language-game theory hence forces us to concede that we cannot have a meaningful conversation about that which is actually going on in the course of interactions, which in turn makes social science and ethics non-referential, and thus essentially meaningless and invalid.

The transition from the idea of a universal conceptual structure to a multitude of paradigms (and forms of life) does not eliminate the problem of self--reference. To say that games are what make every discursive engagement possible[12] is to imply that the multiplicity of language-games conceals something universal, something that all games share. Simply put, we come up against the problem of how second-order discourses relate to first-order ones, where the possibility of the former is presupposed by the very concept of a language-game understood as a universal horizon of meaning.[13]

According to LGT, every action which follows certain rules deserves the name of a game, and this entails that we cannot exclude the possibility of an ideal language-game. Now, according to LCA, the conditions of possibility for game-playing (ideal presuppositions) must be fully encapsulated in a pertinent game, and as such they cannot be thematized in an ordinary way, from the "outside." The problem is that, by definition, the ideal language-game refers to other games. Therefore, LGT yields paradoxical results as regards the possibility of an ideal language-game: according to one criterion (i.e. rule-following), an ideal language-game is possible, but according to another (i.e. reference), it is not. Once the possibility of an ideal language-game is rejected, we are left with no criteria allowing us to decide whether or not a given game is admissible. This, in turn, makes an ideal language-game possible as long as it is rule-based. On the other hand, if were to exclude the ideal language-game on the grounds that it is non-referential, we would have to resort to a meta-position that specifies what being referential essentially means.

Overall, it is important to bear in mind that Wittgenstein's conception of the subject as a limiting concept (of the world or a form of life) can be seen not only as an instrument to preempt metaphysical speculation, but also as an attempt to eliminate the possibility of turning the subject into a subject matter of philosophical analysis, and thus to save subjectivity from objectification. This is

[11] Apel, "Wittgenstein and the Problem of Hermeneutic Understanding."
[12] Apel, *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, 165–166.
[13] Ibid., 29–30, 200. Critically, the argument is not that all games presuppose the same horizon of meaning, but that every game presupposes a unique horizon.

what made this conception so attractive among those historians and social scientists who were intent on revealing specificity and integrity of particular cultures, historical epochs, and communities, Winch and Kuhn being the most obvious cases in point. In other words, Wittgensteinians operate from the premise that the threat of objectifying and taking a judgmental attitude towards those under study can only be prevented if we concede that the subject is fully enveloped in a performance and interaction, and hence that their linguistic and non-linguistic actions can only be understood – in terms of both meaning (sense) and reference – by those also involved in the interaction. These good intentions notwithstanding, as soon as the distinction between means and goals is lifted, language-games easily turn into trivial "word games" with no content and relevance whatsoever.[14] If goals and methods cannot be rendered independently of one another, every performance becomes a goal in itself. In that case, there are no goals or purposes, only self-defining utility functions, as AI researchers would dub it.[15]

In response to this kind of challenge, Apel accepts the basic premise of LGT, but rejects the conclusion according to which it is impossible for social actors to attend to the conditions of possibility for game-playing and to utilize insights gained in the process to regulate future conduct. While conceding that there is no meaning outside of an action, Apel at the same time points out that second-order discourses are not so much based in a theoretic (third-person) approach to their subject matters as they draw upon an "*in actu*" (engaged) type of reflection, which spans over all possible orientations pertinent to social action. The awareness of the essential interconnectedness between the possible orientations underlies a dialectic of freedom and necessity, and enables actors to act in a rational and coordinated manner.

3. THE IDEAL COMMUNITY AS THE TRANSCENDENTAL SUBJECT AND REFERENT OF THE IDEAL LANGUAGE-GAME

According to Apel, the analysis of language-game theory shows that one of the games – namely, the ideal language-game – stands out from all the rest. The ideal community is the referent of an ideal language-game and signifies all counterfactual components as being always-already present in every interaction taking place in the real community. Put another way, the ideal community is a means by which one extends oneself, so to speak, beyond one's here-and-now in such a way as to include in one's self-definition and self-understanding all types of virtual subjects with whom one can interact, as well as possible – pro-

[14] Apel, *Understanding and Explanation*.

[15] Gall calls this a functionalist fallacy: John Gall, *Systemantics: How Systems Work and Especially How They Fail* (New York: Quandangle/The New York Times Books Co., 1975).

spective and retrospective – states of affairs.[16] The ideal community and the real community presuppose each other: whereas the real becomes intelligible only by reference to the ideal, that which is ideal must be able to manifest itself bodily in particular socio-historical conditions. In short, while the real community represents *necessities* associated with pertinent social structures, the ideal community signifies *possibilities* latent in our empirical selves and real communities, and hence the means by which necessities can be negotiated in the course of social exchange. The process is expected to enable a delineation of new trajectories of social action.

In this regard, it is worth noting that although it may not be obvious to us at all times that we partake not only in the real community, but also in the ideal one, the latter nonetheless constitutes a phenomenological category in its own right. The ideal dimension of our interactions is what reveals itself "*in actu*," or engaged, self-reflection.[17] Absent the faculty to attend to that which underlies the real community, we would not be able to consciously navigate it and, if need be, change it. More precisely, to deny phenomenological accessibility of the ideal community would leave us with two options, both of which are unsatisfactory. We could either accept a deflationary view of transcendental entities,[18] which essentially strips the ideal norms of regulatory force, or otherwise assume that the ideal presuppositions act as external forces with respect to social agents, which in turn implies that these supernatural forces affect social interactions in a purely causal manner.[19]

In other words, *in actu* self-reflection is meant to uncover a counterfactual "space" of latent possibilities that are both anticipated in and presupposed by every social involvement. For an action to be meaningful, participants must be engaged in their current situation, but in doing whatever circumstances call for, they are perforce – though not always fully consciously – implicated in unfolding personal, as well as collective, histories that they have to make sense of in order to be able to be genuinely present. According to Apel:

> What is remarkable and dialectical about this situation, however, is that, to some extent, the ideal community is presupposed and even counterfactually anticipated in the real one, as a real possibility of the real society, although the person who engages in an argument is aware that (in most cases) the real community, including himself, is far removed from being similar to the ideal community.

[16] Cf. Charles Sanders Peirce, "The Law of Mind," *The Monist* 2 (1892): 533–259.

[17] Apel, *Understanding and Explanation*.

[18] See Joseph Rouse, *Engaging Science: How to Understand Practices Philosophically* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

[19] For an extended version of this argument, see Stephen P. Turner, *The Social Theory of Practices: Traditions, Tacit Knowledge, Presuppositions* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); *Explaining the Normative* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

> But, by virtue of its transcendental structure, argumentation is left no choice other than to face this both desperate and hopeful situation.[20]

In his *Understanding and Explanation*, Apel provides a demonstration of how engaged self-awareness should be applied to modulate our understanding of our activities, and hence contribute to self-regulation. As Apel points out, scientific experimentation presupposes, as its conditions of possibility, two principles that mutually define and restrict each other: the freedom of action on the part of the researcher and the lawfulness of nature. To accept one to the exclusion of the other is to commit an "abstractive fallacy," and hence, to become confused about what one is actually doing. Apel writes:

> If we wish to understand an experimental interventionist action as such, we cannot objectify it as an observable nexus of events in the external world. If we could, we would of course again confront the Humean problem, and would be unable to infer a causal necessity from the conjunction of phenomena observed. Nevertheless, from a transcendental-pragmatic perspective, we must assume that precisely this necessity obtains in the objectifiable external world (that is, its meaning constitutes itself in relation to the external world) when we reexecute our own interventionist action or that of others in a reflective, interpretive way.[21]

For example, behaviorism (as a meta-position) fails the test of self-reference, for the interventionist (experimentalist) actions that it undertakes with respect to human subjects presuppose exactly what it implicitly denies those very subjects, namely, a freedom of action and rational insight. In the course of self-reflection, these basic conditions of possibility can be uncovered and used to motivate and guide new inquiries.

We might say that, according to transcendental pragmatics, a proper response to what is directly in front of us is conditional upon an ability to place ourselves *within* a larger scheme of things, which, in turns, makes it possible for different options (interpretations, action-orientations) available to us at a given moment to be disclosed, and subsequently tested. Our basic condition is, then, that of an essential tension, to borrow a phrase from Kuhn,[22] between two basic realities which dialectically support each other, but which can never be squared in a manner reminiscent of how a language-game is presumed to fit its pertinent life-form.

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[20] Apel, *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, 281.

[21] Apel, *Understanding and Explanation*, 60.

[22] Thomas Kuhn, *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

4. HABERMAS ON THE METHOD AND PURPOSE OF RECONSTRUCTIVE SCIENCES

The idea behind the project of reconstructive sciences is very straightforward. According to transcendental and formal pragmatics, every social, communicative action is based on certain pragmatic orientations towards the world (subjective, objective, intersubjective), which give rise to so-called validity claims (to expressive sincerity, propositional truth, and normative rightness).[23] Together, these claims produce a three-fold, formal[24] frame of reference that can be unveiled and used for action coordination. This is not a top-down approach because instead of being concerned with these claims *in abstracto*, we are focused on how specific communicative actions embody them. Simply put, the self-referentiality of speech means that concrete practices are able to "talk back" to the "formal" rules which have been derived from such practices, as a result of which a spiral of mutually corrective procedures is put into motion.

As Habermas notes, in order for the inquirer to be able to grasp the *intuitive* knowledge of the speaker under study, he must already be in communication with them. As he states in his discussion of Weber's theory: "such a theory opens up possibilities of learning that are grounded in a developmental logic and that cannot be described in a third-person attitude, but can only be reconstructed in the performative attitude of participants in argumentation."[25]

All this means that in embarking on a rational reconstruction, the inquirer must already possess a tacit, pre-theoretical sense of what it means to be a competent speaker, whereas this sort of "knowledge" must be made manifest in one's own communicative engagement. In other words, for an inquiry to be meaningful in the first place, the inquirer must redeem precisely the same validity claims by which an ordinary speaker – the object of inquiry – is bound. The inquirer does something for which he claims recognition by others, whereby he lays claim to normative rightness. He also intends for his reconstruction to match the reality of whatever is talked about in the communicative situation at hand, and thus he lays claim to propositional truth. And, last but not least, the inquirer wants his formulations to be fitting with respect to the content he wishes to convey – he wants to be understood as realizing a particular communicative intention – whereby he lays claim to expressive sincerity. All these claims being open to scrutiny, a social-scientific investigation can only succeed in a communicative, interactive context.

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[23] Habermas, "What is Universal Pragmatics?" Later, he adds a claim to comprehensibility, but I think this is implied in all others claims, and hence redundant. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

[24] Initially, Habermas referred to these conditions as universal (see "What is Universal Pragmatics?"), but later downgraded them to merely formal properties.

[25] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 220.

For Habermas, the ultimate goal ("telos") of communication is mutual understanding, which in turn allows reciprocal action coordination between participants.[26] Simply put, communicative competences cannot be proven or disproven; they can only be improved upon.

5. HABERMAS'S REBUTTAL OF TRANSCENDENTALISM

In clear contrast with Apel, Habermas maintains that this pragmatic logic eliminates the need to postulate incorrigible, *a priori* principles to account for social action, and thereby is able to replace transcendental philosophy. Habermas takes a fairly firm stand against transcendental philosophy already in the essay in which the project of reconstructive sciences was first laid out.[27] In the first step of his rebuttal of transcendental philosophy, he provisionally accepts the minimalist interpretation of the transcendental which has prevailed in analytic philosophy,[28] on which the transcendental refers to the conceptual structure which makes cognition possible. But even here, he says, the term "transcendental" may be misleading. The reason for this is two-fold.

First, transcendental investigation as set forth by Kant is concerned with the conditions of possibility for, at once, experience *and* objects of (possible) experience,[29] which allegedly means that the experience to which Kant refers is objectifying. Now, if transcendental inquiry were so extended as to include the preconditions for communicative actions, the latter would have to be classified as objects, and approached from a third-person, rather than second-person, perspective.[30] From a formal-pragmatic perspective, this is patently unacceptable:

> The expression "situation of possible mutual understanding" that, from this point of view, would correspond to the expression "object of possible experience," already shows, however, that acquiring the experiences we have in processes of communication is secondary to the goal of reaching understanding that these processes serve. *The general structures of speech must therefore first be investigated from the perspective of reaching understanding and not from that of experience.*[31]

The second, and related, reservation has to do with the fact that transcendental philosophy carries aprioristic connotations. Hence, "adopting the expression 'transcendental' might conceal the break with apriorism that has been made in the meantime."[32] The problem here is that the Kantian framework cannot accommodate the type of investigations required by the weak interpretation of transcendental philosophy:

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[26] Ibid.
[27] Habermas, "What is Universal Pragmatics?," 39.
[28] Ibid., 42ff.
[29] Habermas, "What is Universal Pragmatics?"
[30] Ibid., 44–45; Habermas, "Actions, Speech Acts," 240.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Habermas, "What is Universal Pragmatics?," 45.

> Kant had to sharply separate empirical and transcendental analysis. If we now understand transcendental investigation in the sense of a reconstruction of general and unavoidable presuppositions of experiences that can lay claim to objectivity, then there certainly remains a difference between reconstructive and empirical-analytic analysis. Against this, the distinction between drawing on a priori knowledge and drawing on a posteriori knowledge becomes blurred.[33]

Simply put, rational reconstructions, being as they are self-referential and self-corrective, do not permit us to draw a demarcation line between a priori (transcendental) and a posteriori (empirical-analytic) types of investigations and claims, let alone to establish the former in a judicial position with respect to the latter. In Habermas's eyes, what follows from this is that the process of uncovering the necessary communicative competences is as fallible as any other endeavor in which standard critical-analytic methods must be put to use: "The procedures employed in constructing and testing hypotheses, in appraising competing reconstructive proposals, in gathering and selecting data, are in many ways like the procedures customarily used in the nomological sciences."[34]

Overall, Habermas is of the opinion that, in its alleged adherence to the philosophy of consciousness and its reliance on a third-person orientation, transcendental philosophy proves incapable of overcoming the stance of traditional metaphysics. Whereas metaphysical speculation aims to derive the totality of statements about the objective world from a set of basic principles whose validation does not require an empirical proof, transcendental philosophy is a mere mentalistic reaction to this undertaking, and more precisely, an attempt to internalize the conditions of possibility for experience and its objects, which is to say, reduce the objective to the subjective and mental.[35]

6. FALLIBILISM AND THE FINAL GROUNDING

Habermas's objection to apriorism touches the very heart of his disagreement with Apel. Apel decided to follow Wolfgang Kuhlmann's suggestion that the ideal language-game is grounded in principally different types of *statements* from those upon which first-level discourses are founded.[36] As he points out, "these statements can, *as explications of meaning, be corrected under the pre-*

[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 46.
[35] See also Jürgen Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, ed. Barbara Fultner (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003).
[36] Karl-Otto Apel, "Normatively Grounding 'Critical Theory' Through Recourse to the Lifeworld? A Transcendental-Pragmatic Attempt to Think with Habermas Against Habermas," in *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, ed. Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Claus Offe, and Albrecht Wellmer, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 125–170.

supposition they are true. But they are infallible precisely insofar as they state necessary presuppositions of the principle of fallibilism."[37] In other words, fallibilism presupposes certain principles of critique that are not themselves falsifiable; to contend that they are would be to undermine the very possibility of a meaningful critique – that is to say, one grounded in validity claims – and as such, to commit a performative contradiction.[38]

Habermas, in turn, had judged that reconstructive sciences do not hinge on a metalinguistic language-game. In his opinion, to assume otherwise is to overstep the bounds of pragmatics.[39] The presuppositions of communication are ideal and universal in the sense that (1) we cannot do without them, and (2) they are never fully redeemable. But since these conditions are pragmatic (action-bound), they cannot be turned into universally valid statements or rules of conduct, for this would presuppose the need for some top-down, doctrine-driven control over actions.

As Habermas observes, the principle of fallibilism is tightly linked with the idea of justification and reason.[40] That is to say, fallibilism does not amount to mere skepticism, but primarily is a consequence of the fact that regardless of what we do, we always lay claims to validity, and hence are forced to self--validate in the eyes of others. This circumstance testifies to human rationality, but it also entails that the process of intersubjective validation has nowhere to stop and nothing to fall back on. The need for reason is universal, but there is not a single reason that could escape the possibility of being countered by another reason. It is in this sense that the claims of reconstructive sciences must be, in the end, deemed to be fallible. According to Habermas,

> This does not strip the validity claim redeemed with the help of these reasons of one iota of its unconditionality. The fallibilist meaning of an argumentational game takes into account only that universal validity claims have to be raised factually – namely, in our respective context, which does not remain stationary, but rather will change.[41]

As far as Habermas is concerned, when offering the "final grounding," Apel commits an abstractive fallacy of a cognitivist type. In Habermas's assessment, Apel's conception of the ideal community is "almost too Kantian," and betrays

[37] Apel, "Normatively Grounding 'Critical Theory'," 164n9.
[38] See also Herbert Schnädelbach, "The Transformation of Critical Theory," in *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, ed. Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Claus Offe, and Albrecht Wellmer, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 7–22.
[39] Habermas, "A Reply."
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 232.

the author's adherence to the long overcome Two Realm Doctrine.[42] Apel's proposal, that is, objectifies what is merely pragmatic with a view to establishing it as a referent of a higher-order discourse, as if attempting to circumvent intersubjective meaning and understanding that can only emerge from within a communicative situation. Habermas hence sees no need to postulate anything reminiscent of the ideal community, and states flatly that ideal suppositions are nothing more than social facts.[43] He writes: "The presumption of fallibilism refers solely to the fact that we cannot exclude the possibility of falsification even given convincingly justified theories which are accepted as valid. Otherwise we have not understood what 'to be justified' means."[44]

Note, however, that to say that the principles of communicative action are fallible, or worse, falsifiable, is precisely to succumb to theory-centrism, and hence to commit the very fallacy that Apel has been accused of committing. Habermas's argument concerning the fallibility of validity claims appears to be based on equivocation: fallibility is once understood as criticizability that promotes learning and leads to an improvement in the grasp and application of universal principles, while on other occasions, it is conceptualized in terms of quasi-empirical verification (falsifiability), in the course of which the principles are systematically tested, rejected, and replaced by better ones.

This double meaning of fallibility is the key to Apel's position in this controversy. Transcendental pragmatics has it that while particular philosophical and social-scientific *propositions* are fallible, the fact that each lay a *specific type of claim to validity* is not. Since, in turn, every type of claim presupposes the remaining two, what every actor is committed to is the ideal frame of reference in its totality. On these grounds, Apel contends that Habermas's refusal to concede that his formal conditions for communicative action, which are *de facto* universal, are not transcendental, amounts to a performative contradiction.[45]

As we have stated already, the dialectic between the real and ideal community entails that for the a priori principles *qua* ideal presuppositions to be meaningful, they must be enacted in real-life settings. The claims of the ideal language-game are redeemable in the process of interaction, in the course of which participants validate and correct their specific views on a given subject matter, in exactly the way Habermas proposed. This means that Apel acknowledges that the meaning of the ideal presuppositions changes from

[42] Ibid., 242.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 232.
[45] Apel, "Normatively Grounding 'Critical Theory'." Interestingly, Habermas advances a similar argument against Robert Brandom's normative pragmatics: Jürgen Habermas, "From Kant to Hegel: On Robert Brandom's Pragmatic Philosophy of Language," in *Truth and Justification*, ed. Barbara Fultner (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), 131–173.

individual to individual, and from culture to culture, and that this form of transcendental understanding is subject to improvement and reinterpretation. What he refuses to concede is that the possibility of different interpretations makes these conditions purely formal, i.e. contentless. Note that the concept of the ideal presuppositions being purely formal presupposes a problematic distinction between synthetic and analytic statements, which Habermas otherwise rejects.

In order to facilitate a proper understanding of the distinction between the fallibility of possible reasons and the infallibility of the presumption of reason, let us briefly examine the manner in which the general (ideal) frame of reference itself can be thematized along transcendental-pragmatic lines.

Transcendental pragmatics implies that we can put the ideal principles of communicative action into service of the positioning of different types of action within the general frame of reference – i.e. along the I–Thou–It coordinate system – and in the context of other actions and practices. Such delineations are error-prone, and thus require scrutiny and intersubjective validation. We may disagree about, for example, exactly how much emotional distancing (third-person orientation) is necessary to ensure effectiveness of a medical procedure, or endeavor to establish the amount of such distancing that is required in the medical as compared to psychotherapeutic context. More generally, a sound discourse can be had about which of the three basic orientations is the best fit in a given context. In virtue of the fact the three basic orientations denote three legitimate, complementary ways of interacting with the world, one is free and encouraged to utilize scientific knowledge and method in these sorts of considerations.[46]

Nonetheless, for the disagreement over such issues to be productive, we must always follow the ultimate principle according to which the general frame of reference should not be violated in the process of intersubjective validation. While all interactions hinge on a changing dynamic of the interplay between the three basic orientations, what is critical for all those involved is that their sense of subjective meaningfulness, their commitment to reciprocity and responsibility, and their sense of reality are, at the end of the day, left intact and preferably are reinforced. The non-violability of the formal frame of reference is a moral principle, arrived at through an engaged self-reflection, which is non-negotiable on pain of performative contradiction. It is in this sense that the complexity of the transcendental subject is a *grounding* principle with respect to the complexity of the lifeworld and communicative action as postulated by Habermas.

On the transcendental-pragmatic model, self-reflection is a process that strives to uncover actors' preunderstandings of themselves, their actions, and the world around them. Though this preunderstanding becomes refined and modified – sometimes deeply – along the way, it remains a necessary precondi-

[46] Apel, *Understanding and Explanation*.

tion of communicative involvement. Therefore, understanding is not a result of communicative processes in the same way in which explanation is a result of the application of scientific method. By attending to the principles underlying actions and practices, participants inevitably learn something new about themselves, each other, and the interaction itself, which leads to a progressive expansion and differentiation of the general frame of reference. Such processes reinforce actors' awareness with respect to their internal complexity that matches the complexity of the world they inhabit. Put differently, self-regulation in the course of interaction and mutual coordination of action are two sides of the same coin.

Therefore, the ideal language-game, on which transcendental-pragmatic inquiries rely, is no more objectifying than any other language-game; it is simply meant to make the subject more aware of different positions that can be taken as regards an issue at hand, and of how these different orientations can be coordinated and integrated so as to allow a more encompassing frame of reference to emerge. Thus construed, the ideal language-game is aimed at working out new ways of social interaction, just as Habermas thought communication should. Nevertheless, on top of this, transcendental pragmatics entails that self-reflection is a basis for universally valid existential statements about one's fundamental condition as a human being and social actor, which is necessary for each of the social actors to wholeheartedly accept and try to enact. First and foremost, it invites us to acknowledge and embrace our internal complexity and the fact that the striving for the expansion of the general frame of reference is part and parcel of our life-form, of our being *at once* embodied and transcendental subjects.

With regards to the latter assertion, one more misunderstanding must be dispelled. Wellmer, for example, takes Apel to proclaim self-transparency of the subject (*qua* the ideal community), and counters his position along the lines of Derrida, by stating that the ideal communicative situation is redeemable only at the end of human history.[47] I think it should be clear by now, however, that the dialectic between the ideal and the real undercuts such an eschatological construal. The ideal community is not the same thing as an ideal (perfect) communicative situation. From the transcendental-pragmatic perspective, the end of history can only be conceptualized as a full alignment between the ideal and the real, whereas the human condition is that of irremovable tension between these two realities, which is what fuels learning and progress. The internal tension demands a constant dialogue, accompanied by self-reflection that remains vigilant with respect to possible transgressions of the general frame of reference.

[47] Albrecht Wellmer, "The Debate about Truth: Pragmatism without Regulative Ideas," in *Pragmatic Turn in Philosophy: Contemporary Engagements between Analytic and Continental Thought*, ed. William Egginton and Michael Sandbothe (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), 93–114.

7. CONCLUSIONS: WHAT DO WE GET OUT OF THE CONCEPT OF THE IDEAL COMMUNITY?

The ideal community as conceptualized by Apel is neither an unachievable goal, nor a necessary fiction. Primarily, it is a medium through which one can come into contact with virtual subjects, and in the course of such an interaction, make oneself, as well as others, progressively clearer to themselves. From a transcendental-pragmatic perspective, to counterfactually assume the validity of universal norms of communication is not simply to act *as if* our real-life partners were fully rational, but primarily to attempt to formulate mutual expectations based on the potential we all possess as at once real and transcendental subjects, and to hold ourselves and one another accountable for any breaches in this department. In short, the ideal community delineates what we are capable of becoming based on what we have been, rather than simply what we currently are.

Although in his later writings Habermas provides a phenomenological analysis of each of the three worlds,[48] he nonetheless insists that the formal frame of reference is made up of immutable, if purely formal and essentially contentless, validity claims and associated worlds. A strongly deflationary construal of transcendental entities to which Habermas (explicitly) subscribes entails that these formal conditions cannot be rendered independently of their specific manifestations. In other words, in his rendering, norms are a direct reflection of a given lifeworld, which amounts to a mild version of the logical connection argument. As Habermas's critics were eager to point out, the recommendation to counterfactually assume communicative intent on the part of social actors in fact legitimizes a given social order and all exclusion associated with it.[49] The concept of the ideal community removes the fallacious idea of a one-to-one correspondence between ideal norms and a particular lifeworld, without severing the connection between them. If we consider the frame of reference ideal in a strong sense of the word, validity claims will have to be conceptualized as open slots to fill in. On that reading, norms *qua* validity claims are not entirely contentless, for they delineate the basic dimensions of

[48] See Habermas's upgraded account of the three worlds laid out in *Truth and Justification*.

[49] See, e.g., Michael Kelly, ed., *Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994); David Owen, "Foucault, Habermas, and the Claims of Reason," *History of the Human Science* 9, no. 2 (1997): 119–138; Bent Flyvbjerg, "Habermas and Foucault: Thinkers for Civil Society?", *British Journal of Sociology* 49, no. 2 (June 1998): 210–233; Terry K. Alajdem, "Of Truth and Disagreement: Habermas, Foucault and Democratic Discourse," *History of European Ideas* 20, no. 4–6 (January 2002): 909–914. Ejvind Hansen, "The Foucault--Habermas Debate: The Reflexive and Receptive Aspects of Critique," *Telos* 130 (Spring 2005): 63–83; Amy Allen, "Discourse, Power, and Subjectivation: The Foucault/Habermas Debate Reconsidered," *The Philosophical Forum* 40, no. 1 (January 2006): 1–28.

every lifeworld (the ideal community) that are amenable to reflection, and therefore reconstruction. In other words, transcendental pragmatics entails that each of the three basic orientations (subjective, intersubjective, and objective) have certain phenomenological *qualities* that are constant regardless of particular objects and situations to which they apply. While we are always bound by *particular* validity claims, each of the category of claims adds a specific coloring to the objects and situations we are dealing with, allowing us to distinguish between different approaches we can adopt toward the same thing. In this light, meaning is that which emerges at the cross-section of "objects" and our attitudes toward them.

Finding (or failing to find) a balance between these orientations also has distinguishable qualities. We may have a sense that a certain imbalance can be remedied, or we might experience helplessness. All this makes it possible for us to conceive of intersubjective situations in terms of types, as opposed to singularities and natural kinds. As mentioned before, the main requirement which stems from the concept of the ideal community is that every move in one direction (e.g. subjective) must be eventually compensated by proper moves in the other two directions, that is, by adopting intersubjective-dialogical and objective perspectives.

Further, the concept of the ideal community, which loosens the ties between norms and settings to which they apply, enables us to distinguish a fourth category in the validity claims schema that was not explicitly conceded by Habermas. If we look at the schema from the perspective of types of persons or objects – and by the same token, of types of interactions or communicative situations – validity claims signify, the following categorization ensues.

The first category comprises a type of people with whom we, through the process of so-called projective identification,[50] identify to a considerable degree. It is equivalent to the subjective world in Habermas's sense. This type of people are those whom we are likely to want to imitate, therefore we can refer to this category as *the realm of aspiration*. For example, when we see people who appear to have what we want, instead of trying to take their place, we can try to learn from them and then to create proper opportunities for ourselves. Defective attitudes along this dimension can result in an unmitigated competitiveness. Another symptom of a disorder on this level is a tendency to compartmentalize the social world into those who possess the same level of competence and achievement as us, and those who are ranked higher and hence pose a threat to be eliminated.

The second category, which we can call the *realm of exchange*, consists of those people whom we deem supportive of and complementary to our own life-

[50] See, e.g., Phoebe Crame, *Protecting the Self: Defense Mechanisms in Action* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2006).

-form. This category corresponds to Habermas's social or intersubjective world, and represents our ability to recognize others as equal, but distinct. The important caveat is that we will categorize someone as a member of this category only if they appear to have something to offer to us, and, ideally, vice versa.

The third category – *the realm of adaptation* – represents the components of our internal and external environments that are beyond our control, and that force us to adapt. In light of Habermas's categorization, this is the objective world.[51] Disturbances along this dimension manifest as a fear-propelled withdrawal, or, conversely, arrogance and exaggerated forcefulness, an inability to let things be.

The fourth and final category is not, strictly speaking, a category insofar it designates our blind spots, people and things we cannot see or to which we are indifferent. For this reason, it has no equivalent in Habermas's system, which to some extent explains the difficulties his project ran into and the criticism it attracted. In short, the realm of blind spots designates a category of people who are, from our perspective, beyond the sphere of mutual recognition and concern.

Mismanagement of the realm of blind spots results in indifference and ignorance. Hence, this (non-)category is a reminder that there are things that our current perception and understanding do not cover. In other words, this realm alerts us to the fact that there are some things out there that are not yet sufficiently *real* to us. Importantly, it takes conscious effort to realize that it even exists. The challenge here is to actively screen oneself for possible blind spots in order to facilitate proper categorization. In order to turn blind spots into proper categories, we must self-reflect upon the existing patterns of action and perception and try to imagine interactions that are possible, but not yet realized. This form of self-reflection is a way to deal with negative aspects of projection, the so-called splitting.[52] By identifying and modifying habits of thought, action, and perception in such a way as to incorporate new groups of partners into our frame of reference, we simultaneously enlarge the real and ideal community.

In summary, then, Habermas's validity claims schema implies that rational action requires constant alternating between subjective, intersubjective, and objective orientations toward problems at hand.[53] If there is no space between these orientations as such and their manifestations in a particular setting, however, then this process cannot be deemed rational and may be demonstrated to merely reflect current external (socio-political) and internal (motivational)

[51] See Habermas, *Truth and Justification*.

[52] Crame, *Protecting the Self*.

[53] See also Martin Seel, "The Two Meanings of 'Communicative' Rationality: Remarks on Habermas's Critique of a Plural Concept of Reason," in *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas's "The Theory of Communicative Action"*, ed. Axel Honneth and Hans Joas, trans. Jeremy Gaines and D. L. Jones (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), 36–48.

pressures to which actors are exposed and of which social actors may not even be aware. Thereby, the concept of the ideal community, which provides a missing link between current states of affairs and future possibilities, remedies this shortcoming and makes Habermas's validity claims schema workable as a means of bringing about progress.

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